

California conservation group criticizes older buildings' energy use

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Commercial buildings in California consume more than a third of the electricity used statewide, but much of that energy is wasted, according to a new report.

Next 10, a San Francisco nonprofit group that supports green technology, said businesses and state government could save millions of dollars each year and help lower greenhouse gas emissions through the use of relatively simple energy retrofits.

"Up to 80 percent of the energy used by commercial buildings is going up in smoke," Next 10 founder F. Noel Perry said in a news release.

The group commissioned Collaborative Economics of Mountain View to compile the report, which drew on research conducted by other entities, including the U.S. Department of Energy.

"As our state struggles to emerge from recession, relatively low-tech energy efficiency fixes could save California businesses and the state government significant money and help to generate jobs," Perry said.

The 13-page report said usage by commercial buildings represents more than 37 percent of statewide electricity demand.

It also is responsible for about 25 percent of all carbon emissions, the study said.

Next 10 noted that relatively simple fixes such as upgrading the insulation in a building could cut usage by as much as 30 percent.

Improving lighting technology could save another 20 percent, the report said.

"With a minimal 2 percent increase in construction costs, new buildings can be designed to use one-third to one-half less energy than they use today," the report said.

While California leads the nation when it comes to energy efficiency standards for new construction, those standards don't apply to existing buildings, which represent more than 97 percent of the state's inventory of commercial space, Next 10 said.

Bob Raymer, senior engineer and technical director for the 5,000-member California Building Industry Association, said he also believes that state's energy efficiency standards should apply to older developments.

Existing buildings, especially those built before 1980, are much less energy efficient, and therefore are responsible for a much larger share of greenhouse gases, he said.

"You can get so much bigger bang for the buck going after older commercial buildings," he said.

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